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ABSTRACT

Middle school students need materials that encourage them to finish meaningful assignments without coercion or teacher intervention. Teachers who motivate middle school students to think and work on their own will allow students to express their feelings, have a part in decision making, and eventually share their product with other people. It is vitally important to present students with information that they need and to do so in the most efficient way possible. In organizing instruction, teachers need to: (1) determine whether students possess necessary entry level competencies; (2) select materials for a variety of stimuli; (3) prepare appropriate strategies before giving the lesson; and (4) present materials in an orderly manner. Researchers conclude that teachers should be involved with academic content, give clear sequential directions, emphasize main points, ask questions, conduct reviews, and ignore irrelevancies. Practitioners may find the included checklist useful for evaluating materials. Sample materials for analysis are provided. (RH)

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ASSESSING THE MOTIVATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

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ASSESSING THE MOTIVATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

How do prospective middle school teachers discover what may engage a young adolescent learner? How do they touch that inward disposition to enjoy the task at hand?

Imaginative teaching for genuine engagement requires attention to both what needs to be learned and what motivates the learner -- it implies a content in which students have some personal stake. Expertise can no longer be viewed as consisting solely of the possession of a quantity of information--it must rather be seen as the ability to motivate students to become producers rather than consumers of knowledge. Thoughtful observers of American education are coming to recognize the indispensible role of the school in developing positive affective association related to academic subjects. Teachers that are facilitators, who help youngsters to implement their own learning goals, touch that inward disposition to enjoy the task at hand by providing materials that stretch the imagination and challenge students to think.

It is possible to empower middle level learners by encouraging them to make decisions and then providing them with feedback on resultant learning. Students are motivated toward goals that allow them to construct their own meaning and enable them to feel successful when sharing the results of learning experiences with classmates. Motivation for human beings is set in motion when they see themselves reaching goals which will satisfy the need for self-determination, the need to control their own environment, the need for social interaction, and the need to achieve (Levesque, 1989).

Middlers need materials that will encourage them to finish meaningful

assignments without coercion or teacher intervention. Selecting reproducible materials that promote such behavior is not the easy task that it might seem. If students don't want to stick with an idea, the task may never be completed or be done in a manner which obviates any justification for the assignment. But when activities engage the affect and challenge students to think, the possibilities are endless.

Motivating Middlers to think and work on their own means allowing them to express their own feelings, have a part in a decision making process, and eventually share their product with other people. Useful instructional materials will institute the desired behavior by providing the challenge and energy that gets students off to a good start. They give direction and purpose to learning behaviors by offering the kinds of choices that promote perserverance.

As we look at the materials we are preparing for youngsters, it is most important that we go back and look at the overall framework and purpose for their existence. Many middle level schools have asked themselves the vital question: Are we creating a climate in which children can learn those things worth knowing? A much tougher question is: Have we delved into the curriculum to the extent that we know the material presented really consists of material worth learning?

It is vitally important to present students with information that they need and to do it in the most efficient way possible. It is not efficient to give children material that so bores them that they forget it by the next day. It is not efficient to teach children things simply because they were worth knowing 50 years ago. Just because a set of skills or a body of knowledge was meaningful for us, our parents, or our grandparents, does not mean that it is valid for the next generation.

Middle level educators today are quite skilled at looking at their "middleschoolness." The next step is to become skilled at looking at the validity of curriculum as well as the methods used to attain curricular goals.

In organizing instruction, the teachers need to determine if students possess necessary entry level competencies, select materials for a variety of stimuli, prepare appropriate strategies prior to the lesson and then handle and present those materials in an orderly manner.

Brophy (1987) stated that students will want to learn when they apppreciate the vlaue of classroom activites and when they believe the will succeed if they apply reasonable effort

Classroom observations indicate that teachers tend to rely on instructional materials to carry out academic tasks (Doyle, 1983) and effective teachers make expert use of existing instructional materials (Porter and Brophy, 1988). This would suggest that these materials must be carefully selected and well organized in order to have students reach the desired objectives. Yet estimates indicate that 85-90% of American teachers follow one or another basal textbook which places a severe restriction on instructional alternatives (Duffy & Ball, 1983) unless a wide range of supplementary activities are available. If as Doyle says, students have spent two-thirds of their time during elementary school doing seatwork using printed worksheets, it may explain evidence that suggests these same students have difficulty learning with any degree of comprehension from the instructional materials they often encounter in middle level classes.

Brophy and Good (1986) felt that teacher effectiveness could be better examined by considering student achievement and its relation to teacher behavior. They concluded that productive learning activities have an appropriate difficulty level, do not lose momentum, and result in high levels of success. Seatwork, they say, should be appropriate in difficulty, should

consitute a meaningful activity, and should be sufficiently easy to allow nearly 100% success with reasonable effort.

Any teaching/learning strategies which improve the quality of the time that pupils spend in a school are likely to have a direct effect on student achievement. It has been observed that effective teachers use more positive motivation in their interactions with students than do less effecive teachers (Medley, 1978). One of the ways these teachers stimulate students is through the questions they ask, knowing that the interchanges must be frequent as well as carefully phrased and relevant (Rosenshine, 1983). It will not surprise good teachers that many researchers have concluded that greater student outcomes are achieved when students are motivated to spend more time on task-related content activities rather than on non-academic activites. (Berliner, 1982). Walberg (1988) contended that the new focus of education should be on what he calls productive time rather than allocated time or time-onOtask. Productive time means time spent on suitable lessons adapted to the learner rather than engaged or allocated time which may be futile if the content or instruction does not match the individual learner's needs and interests. He argues that engaged time may be only marginally effective because conventional whole group instruction cannot accommodate the vast differences in individual learning rates and prior knowledge and since learners with weak study skills can engage in study and drill without learning.

Researchers conclude that, in the active teaching process, the teacher should be involved with academic content, give clear sequential directions, emphasize main points, ask questions, conduct reviews and ignore irrelevancies. (Rosenshine 1976&1977; Good and Grows,1977; Gow, 1977; Ruff, 1978; & Medley 1978). If we are to provide motivation for our students, can we ask less of the materials than we do of the person who assigns them?

The materials choosen for guided practice in fact have a great deal to do with maintaining instructional momentum by expediting the business of learning through smooth transitions and efficient use of time. When assignments approach subject matter in a direct but creative way, students maintain momentum showing greater task orientation and greater involvement with the subject at hand.

Teachers who want students to be actively involved in their own learning have a need for assignments that both supplement and complement the textbook. It is a potent but challenging responsibility to provide materials that support and extend textbook learning so as to stimulate this ongoing engagement. The problem is how to evaluate materials available to determine if they fulfill instructional needs yet promote desired effects. The following checksheet may provide some guidance.

EVALUATING GUIDED PRACTICE MATERIALS

Place a ✓ by each statement that applies to your assignment. Give 1 point for each ✓.

Materials used as assignments should:

- ☐ stimulate students to finish meaningful assignments
- ☐ give clear sequential directions
- ☐ engage the affect and/or challenge students to think
- ☐ deal with content worth learning
- ☐ use stimuli that varies from the main mode of presentation
- ☐ help students relate content to their own learning goals.

If you are using a reproducible worksheet, is it designed to:

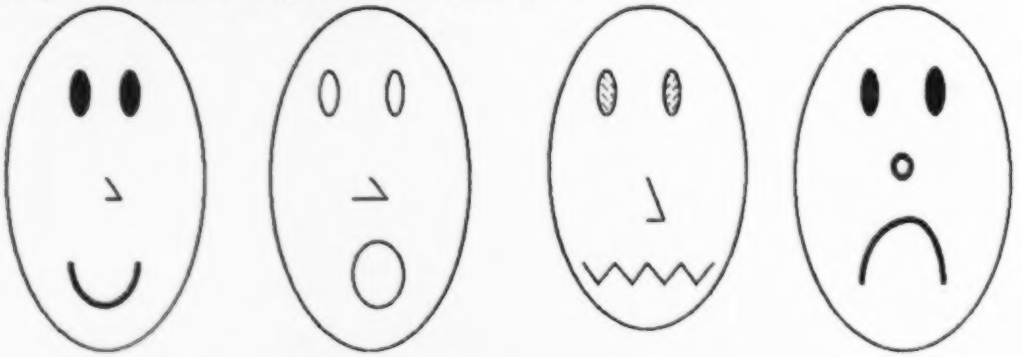
- ☐ give direction and purpose?
- ☐ promote a positive attitude?
- ☐ offer choices that promote perserverance?
- ☐ provide for critical thinking about the topic?
- ☐ try to meet learning needs of this age student?
- ☐ fit into a larger premise or generalization?
- ☐ leave students with a sense of accomplishment?

Materials should meet at least some of these criteria for good teaching:

- ☐ Stop misconduct indirectly by suggesting a positive activity.
- ☐ Orient students to the assignment by telling what is expected.
- ☐ Explain what the student is going to accomplish.
- ☐ Involve students in recalling the content of prior lessons.
- ☐ Alert each student to material that deserves special attention.
- ☐ Engender enthusiasm nonverbally.
- ☐ Encouraging students to use time productively.
- ☐ Engage students in analyzing both cause and effect.
- ☐ Require justification, evidence, or comparisons.
- ☐ Appeal to different sensory modes of learning.
- ☐ Maintain instructional momentum by providing alternatives.
- ☐ Initiate student to student interchange related to lesson content.
- ☐ Acknowledge specific instances of academic progress.

SAMPLE MATERIALS TO USE FOR ANALYSIS

A. In preparing materials we need to ask for opinions. For example here are some people that ____ Explain their reactions.



_____ _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____

B. Students may need to consider the ways in which people selling themselves or their ideas. The techniques listed below are used by advertisers to sell products. But the same techniques are also used by politicians, literary figures, and even students to convince you that one thing, person, or concept is better than another. You may want students to watch, read, listen and apply the same type of analysis to people they observe or studied about.

1. JUMP ON BOARD -- Everybody is doing it, you should too.
2. JOURNALISTIC LICENSE -- Use information for only <u>one</u> position or product
3. JUDGE NOT -- Use emotion laden words for persuading not evaluating
4. JAUNDICED OR JEALOUS -- Use derogatory labels or remarks, no evaluation
5. JUST FOLKS - Identify with common man to convince
6. JOIN THE GROUP -- Famous person endorses product, unclear association
7. JINGOISM -- Clever slogan, song or utterance that just sticks in the mind

C. Perhaps you need for students to review vocabulary, thinking about the context of the words that they have been using. Graphit is played like *Battleship* by pairs of students each of whom needs two grids. Each player writes in 6 words on one graph (one letter per space) and uses the other to record hits and misses from the other player. In designing the game, you must provide a vocabulary list and a source for the meanings of the words. The students alternate in calling coordinates. In order to acore a word the player must name it and define it or use it in a sentence. It may

also be played by scoring one point for each letter located; 5 points for guessing a word, and defining it and minus 3 points if the guess is incorrect.

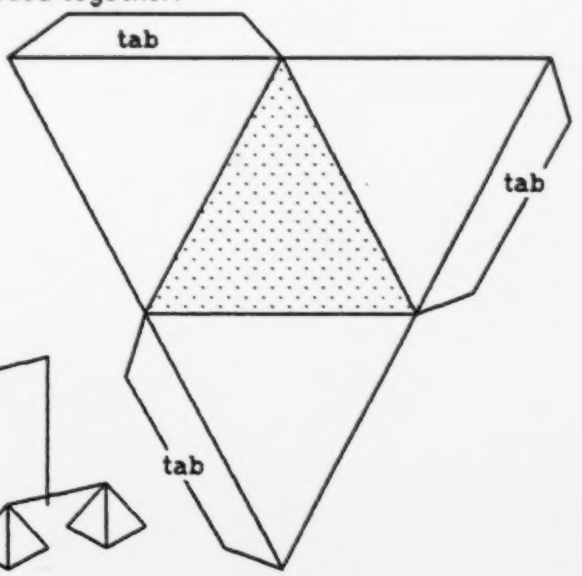
D. Many of us have been presented with survival problems solving situations such as "Lost on the Moon" or "What to take on the Mayflower." You or your students cano design such an activity for by filling in the situation paragraph. You will need to consider what will be on the inventory and what directions to give those making the decisions.

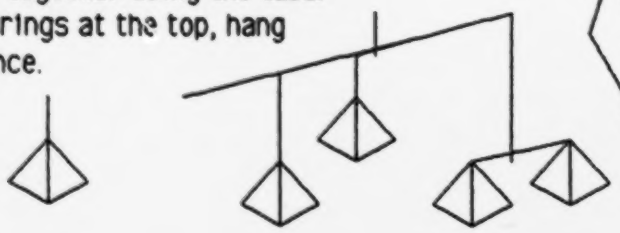
You are a _____ *On* _____
you and _____ *begin a trip* _____
Disaster strikes when _____ *and*
_____ *There is nothing for to do*
but _____ *even though it will*
take _____. *You take a quick inventory and find that the*
following items are left. Based on _____
you decide that only _____ *items may be taken*

E. Rather than making a content map or semantic web about the ideas in the chapter in your textbook, have students put the ideas on some kind of art project like a mobile. They can sketch out ideas before putting them on the figures. Label can be pasted onto the strings and figures glued together.

MAKE A MOBILE

Here is a pattern for a triangular pyramid. Using this as a pattern draw as many as you will need. Cut them out, write or draw on the sides, fold them up and glue the form together using the tabs. Insert strings at the top, hang and balance.





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